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Main contra group gets a new leader

By Robert Parry
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WASHINGTON — The chief U.S.-backed Nicaraguan rebel group, torn by internal dissension and charges of mismanagement, is undergoing a behind-the-scenes shake-up that includes the appointment of a Miami-based exiled businessman to coordinate its financial and political operations.

Leonardo Somarriba was named secretary general of the United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO) last month, but no announcement was made because, according to Nicaraguans close to the group, admission of problems could have undercut President Reagan's effort to win congressional approval of \$100 million in military and humanitarian aid.

The Democratic-controlled House is scheduled to reconsider that package on April 15, after defeating it on a 220-210 vote last month. Reagan's proposal cleared the Republican-dominated Senate by 53-47 on March 27.

Somarriba's appointment — in effect, to be UNO's chief executive officer — indicates an apparent shift in power away from the umbrella group's three publicly known directors: Adolfo Calero, who also heads the chief rebel army, the CIA-organized Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN); and two former Sandinista government officials, Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo.

In a recent interview, Somarriba, 48, said he would try to improve UNO's efficiency and increase the cooperation among the three directors, who have often been at odds over conduct of the war. He said he was now preparing a plan to reorganize UNO, which was created in June at the urging of the White House.

He said he would try to "establish a structure so the three members can work together. . . . I personally have no political ambitions," he said.

The UNO shake-up follows mounting complaints from Nicaraguan exiles that the organization had failed to achieve either political or military unity in the war against Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government. The exiles have also accused the group of mishandling U.S. funds and of nepotism.

The Nicaraguan Business Council, a group of conservative exiled business leaders, outlined the complaints in a heated, private meeting with the three UNO directors in Miami on Jan. 18, according to several participants who insisted on anonymity.

With Somarriba acting as their spokesman, the Nicaraguan businessmen criticized UNO's leadership for its internal bickering, subservience to the United States and the naming of cronies to key jobs, the participants said.

UNO's directors have fought among themselves over such issues as reducing human rights abuses by contra troops — a problem publicly acknowledged by Cruz but vigorously disputed by Calero.

The participants said Calero reacted angrily to the businessmen's criticism. One said that Calero's response was "petulant, cocky, rude," but that Cruz and Robelo were receptive.

FDN spokesman Bosco Matamoros said Calero was traveling and unavailable for comment.

In a separate report, a group of former FDN commanders, known as the Nicaraguan Coalition of Opposition to the Regime, criticized the FDN's "huge, inefficient bureaucracy" and charged that "cronyism and nepotism [were] rampant at all levels."

Last month, the General Accounting Office, Congress' investigative arm, reported that it could not track \$7.1 million in U.S. aid provided to

UNO and funneled through Miami-based "brokers" to Central America. The money was part of \$27 million in U.S. nonlethal aid approved by Congress last year.

The GAO's findings focused specific attention on Calero's use of his brother, Mario, and his brother-in-law, Aristedes Sanchez, to operate the FDN's supply and financial networks.

Mario Calero and the FDN have denied improper use of the money, and spokesman Matamoros has distributed affidavits from FDN suppliers asserting that Mario Calero has not requested nor received illegal payments.

Some prominent Nicaraguan exiles have publicly attacked UNO's directors as hand-picked by the Reagan administration and lacking signifi-

cant popular support inside Nicaragua and within the exile community.

"UNO is designed to do battle in Congress, not to do battle in the front lines, with the people of Nicaragua," said Silvio Arguello-Cardenal, a vice president of Nicaragua during the 1960s.

Rival rebel leaders, such as one-time Sandinista hero Eden Pastora, have complained that the funneling of U.S. aid through the FDN-dominated UNO is an attempt to subjugate other rebel organizations to the FDN and the United States.

Several Nicaraguan exiles have said that Somarriba has had a close working relationship with the CIA. Former FDN leader Edgar Chamorro said that when the CIA recruited him into the FDN's directorate in late 1982, Somarriba accompanied a senior CIA official to an initial meeting in Miami. Somarriba has denied working with the CIA.

As a businessman and investor in Nicaragua, Somarriba was considered close to Jorge Salazar, the leader of a business group opposed to the Sandinistas.

In November 1980, Salazar was gunned down by Sandinista police, who claimed he was caught with a supply of weapons.

Somarriba says that he was later jailed for several weeks and that he left for the United States after being freed.